

# *Sketch*

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*Volume 23, Number 2*

1957

*Article 7*

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## Search Without End

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## **Abstract**

Tom Brady walked through the bar and into the ballroom of the Rexford Club. Pausing just inside the archway connecting the two rooms...

## *Search Without End*

TOM BRADY walked through the bar and into the ballroom of the Rexford Club. Pausing just inside the archway connecting the two rooms, he glanced about. The room was less than half-filled; hostesses in bright evening gowns were sprinkled among the darkly garbed Maltese and English, with an occasional Royal Signal Corps uniform giving a reminder of the ever-present British garrison.

Not many customers tonight, Tom thought, probably because of the rain. Malta's climate was generally good; but when it decided to rain, it rained! With so few people present Marie probably wouldn't have to act as a hostess after her dance. They would have a chance to talk before he had to leave.

Tom moved toward his usual table by the wall. A white-jacketed waiter was there before him, pulling out a chair. Tom smiled as he recognized Carlos, his favorite waiter at the club. Carlos could be counted on to bring him up to date on the happenings since he had been gone. Tom remembered how Carlos had appointed himself waiter, counselor, and guide the first night the young American had come to the club. It had been he who introduced Tom to Marie.

"Good evening, Carlos. How are things with you tonight?"

"Fine, Mr. Brady. But we've missed you this past week. Marie has looked for you every night but you haven't been in."

Oh Lord, thought Tom, didn't I tell her I was going to be gone this week? She will be furious, that temper of hers is touchy anyway.

"No, I went over to Gozo for a few days, Carlos. Just got back this afternoon."

"You know, Mr. Brady, I've lived here in Valletta for forty years and have never been to Gozo. It's only a few hours by boat but I've never gone over."

"Well, you haven't missed anything, Carlos. It's just a pile of rocks but the fishing isn't bad. Now how about a Scotch? Send the orchestra a round of drinks too, they look thirsty."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Brady. Right away."

As Carlos left the table the orchestra began tuning its instruments in preparation for the first number. In a few moments Marie would make her appearance. Tom wondered if he should come right out with the statement that he was leaving or if he should build up to it and break the news gently. One thing was certain, he *was* leaving. His sister's letter had decided that. Since he had received it two days ago, telling him of an opening with a large company back home, he had been thinking of returning to the States.

After all, he had been out of the country for nearly a year and a half, fourteen months with an Arabian oil company and these last three months on Malta. The Maltese people had been friendly, they had made him welcome wherever he went; but it had been a long time since he saw his home and family. It would be good to get back to work, too. Before midnight he would be on a ship for Naples, then on to New York by plane. He had already wired the company there for an interview. With his training and experience he had a good chance to land the position.

Tom's thoughts were interrupted by a burst of fanfare from the orchestra. He looked up to see Marie, the Rexford's featured dancer, standing poised in the center of the dance floor. She wore a multi-colored skirt with a white blouse cut low over her tawny shoulders. A single, red rose accentuated the blackness of her hair and eyes. She was small and slender, with a lighter complexion than most Maltese, a heritage from her French mother. The orchestra swung into a Spanish number and with a saucy toss of her head Marie began the dance, castanets clicking in time with the quick tattoo of her heels on the floor.

As Tom watched her fluid movements he thought of

swimming in the clear, blue waters of the Mediterranean; other times when he had been struck by her gracefulness; walking the long distance to the fishing village of Zurriek to see the fishermen mending their nets or repainting their brightly colored boats.

Marie's dances were never stereotyped, never twice the same. She infused herself into each movement, the dance became imbued with her personality. This night she was provocative, teasing, promising everything but always staying just beyond reach. Then with a final, passionate outburst of music she surrendered completely, slipping easily to one knee, her head bowed, a pool of color against the dark floor, receiving the applause of the audience.

Rising, she flashed Tom a quick smile before going to change. Tom smiled and waved in return, then raised his glass in salute to the orchestra as they began "The St. Louis Blues" to thank him for the round of drinks. This had become a custom with them, it occurred every time Tom came to the club.

While Tom waited patiently for Marie to change, Carlos reappeared and placed two hot brandies on the table with the compliments of the orchestra and the information that Marie would be out shortly. Tom thanked him and returned to his unfinished Scotch. The minutes passed and still no sign of Marie. Tom scanned the room, puzzled. She didn't usually take this long to change. Then he saw her, standing a little apart from the group at the bar, watching him. He smiled and beckoned and she came to him quickly. As he seated her she looked up at him and asked, "Did you like the dance, Tom?" Her voice held just a trace of accent.

"Very much, Marie. I don't think I've ever seen you dance better."

"Carlos told me you have been to Gozo the past few days. Why didn't you tell me you were going?"

"Why, I didn't really think of it, Marie. I decided to go on an impulse — do some fishing — and I just packed some gear and went."

"I didn't know what had happened to you. Every night I expected to see you and you weren't here. Please tell me, Tom, before you go away again."

"Certainly, Marie. It was thoughtless of me," Tom replied.

As she chatted on about the happenings of the week Tom fidgeted in his chair, waiting for an appropriate opening to tell her that he was leaving. The way she leaned near him and smiled up into his face as she talked, told of her gladness to be with him again. The club's business had been good, she said. She had seen a new American film starring Clark Gable, a British aircraft carrier was moored in Grand Harbor.

Tom listened and was content to put in an occasional word or question. He enjoyed watching Marie talk; she went about it with the same careless abandon with which she did everything. She kept shifting in her chair, twirling her glass, gesturing and laughing. Tom became so absorbed in her expressions that it was only when she stopped talking and looked at him expectantly that he realized she had asked him a question.

"Oh, I'm sorry Marie. What did you say?"

"Well, sir! You might at least say you were distracted by my beauty or something." Marie pouted, teasing him for a moment before repeating her question. "I asked you if you were staying to take me home tonight. Well, are you?"

"No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I can't, not tonight." Tom was at a loss as to how to begin. He cleared his throat self-consciously and became interested in the wood of the table top. "You see, there's this job I've been offered back home. Uh, it's a good job and uh, well, I've decided to take it."

"That's wonderful, Tom! We can start making plans tomorrow. There will be all sorts of things to do. Oh, and we will have to have a big party." Marie spoke excitedly, her eyes shining. Tom could almost see the plans forming in her mind as she talked. He had better clear things up in a hurry, before she went too far.

"Hold on a minute, Marie. I'm not leaving in a week or so; I'm going tonight. I've already booked passage to Naples."

"Tonight! No, you can't! Why didn't you tell me sooner? Why did you wait until you are leaving?"

"I don't know about the job until two days ago. I've already wired ahead for an interview. I'm terribly sorry you are so upset about this."

"Upset! Oh, don't you know . . .," she broke off suddenly turning her head away. Baffled, Tom sat gazing at

her. Hesitantly he spoke her name; there was no response. He took her hand but she still would not face him. When she finally spoke, her voice was subdued and so low that he had to strain to make out the words.

"Tom, do you have to . . . you must know how I feel about you. Why I always want to be with you. Please, Tom. Say you know. Don't make me tell you."

Tom sat, stunned. There was only one thing she could mean. Sure, they were fond of each other, they had a lot of fun together, but. . . As he tried to puzzle it out, Marie lifted her face. The tears shining in her eyes dispelled any doubts as to her meaning. When she spoke his name it was a questioning plea. There was a sinking, cold feeling within him as he tried desperately to think of something, anything, to say to her.

"Marie, don't cry." He had hoped for a happy parting, one to remember with pleasure. Perhaps a few friendly tears, but not like this. What could he do, say? He had to comfort her somehow. "Marie, listen to me. I *di-z'n't* know . . . believe me, I didn't."

"Tom, now that you do, will . . . will you still leave? Still go home?"

"Yes, things are all set. I've got to go."

"Then take me with you!" Marie leaned close, her voice ringing. "I can leave right away, with you."

No. Marie, I'm — I'm very fond of you; you are a wonderful person; but . . ." Tom glanced at his watch, a little more than thirty minutes and he would have to be at the pier. He stood up. "I have to go now or I'll miss the ship."

Marie rose also. "Wait. Let me walk with you to the street. I don't want to be here alone."

As they went down the stairs toward the street entrance Marie was silent. Tom was thankful for that. Her pain cut him deeply, for he did care for her — not the way she wanted, but he did care. He paused just inside the door to the street and groped for the words that would express his feelings without hurting her more. Marie spoke first. "Tom." Her voice sounded tired, older. "You don't have to marry me, you know. Not if you don't want to. Just take me with you."

"You wouldn't be happy, Marie, even if I did take you.

Your home is here and your people. It would only make you unhappy."

"Do you think I'm happy here? Knowing what is ahead for me! You've seen the women down by the docks, going with any sailor they can get. I don't want to be like them! I don't want to get old here. I've got to get away!"

Startled by her fiery outburst Tom stepped back. He had seen the women down by the harbor; but Marie wasn't like them. And she still had time to change. He tried to tell her this. "You don't have to be like them, Marie. You can quit working in places like the Rexford, get some other kind of a job."

"There aren't any other jobs for me. There is no work for anyone. The war destroyed everything, you know that. Bombed every day for three years!"

"I know it must have been hard, Marie, but . . ."

"Hard! After the war I took soldiers and sailors home because they brought food and we were starving. Is that why you don't love me? Because I've been with them?"

"No, Marie. That wouldn't matter. You're a fine person, nothing can change that. Now I *must* go." Tom bent and kissed her softly on the lips. She clung to him a moment and then stepped back as he started through the doorway into the rain. He got only a few feet when she gave a cry and rushed out to him, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Don't — don't go. Don't — leave me. Please — please, Tom, don't."

Tom pulled free and hurried down the darkened street. At the corner he stopped and looked back. He watched her bowed figure standing in the light of the doorway. It had sounded as though he was only a way to leave the island, to escape the future she feared. No, perhaps she had had that in mind at first, but he was sure that she had come to really love him. Still, a small, half-formed doubt lingered. He would watch a moment, if she went back into the club it would mean that he had been only a means to an end. Just one more step in her search for a way to get out. An endless search. God help her.

As he waited and watched, Marie turned back toward the open door, then faced up the unlighted street away from the harbor. She began to walk, the sound of her heels



echoing down the empty street to Tom. Faster . . . Faster  
 . . . and then she ran.

—Leo Gourley, *T. Jl., Jr.*



## *Single-Valued Arrays*

I spaciouly walk alone the path along which I was once  
 led . . . and taught.

The air is dense with silently suspended snowdrops

Which twinkle in the streetlights

And give the world a wierd brightness.

With me, the single trail in the snow stops

When I see your window to my right.

I look . . . .

You have carefully arranged your things on a table.

And You saw everything that you had made, and, behold, it  
 was very good.

The dollars are for taking you out and keeping you happy.

The jewelry is to make you presentable and keep you happy.

The comic books are for amusing you and keeping you hap-  
 py.

The trinkets are to provide you with interesting conversa-  
 tion and to keep you happy.

The stylish new hat is to wear to church and keep you  
 happy.

The trophies are for making people respect you and keep-  
 ing you happy.

And the scrap paper is for throwing in the waste basket.

The trees in the distance are laden with shining ice.

My hair is white and wet.

Neither the twigs nor I wear a distinguishing label.

There are many people behind many colored doors.

It worries me to wonder how many have tables like yours.

— Ronald Christensen, *E.E., Jr.*